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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 003501

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#)
SUBJECT: READOUT: INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON OUTPOSTS
DECEMBER 11 MEETING

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: On December 11, Vice Premier Haim Ramon told the Ambassador that the basic principle of any legislation to standardize the rules of construction in the West Bank would ensure that any politically sensitive settlement construction would have to be approved by the government. Prior to his meeting with the Ambassador, Ramon's committee met to discuss reservations to the Ministry Of Justice (MOJ) draft proposal and invited opponents to the draft to air any reservations. Ramon said that he hoped to bring forward the draft proposal for a committee vote within a month. However, embassy contacts who attended the meeting say that it is unclear whether a new proposal will be circulated for discussion before the committee vote. End summary.

Legislation Will Avoid Nightmare Settlement Expansion Scenario

12. (C) On December 11, Vice Premier Haim Ramon told the Ambassador that the basic principle of any legislation to standardize the rules of construction in the West Bank would ensure that any politically sensitive settlement construction would have to be approved by the government. He said that his inter-ministerial committee on outposts will draft clear criteria to determine what this means. Ramon said that he was confident that the legislation drafted would avoid the nightmare settlement expansion scenario predicted by Talia Sasson. The Ambassador noted US opposition to Israel's adoption of any law that would contravene the commitments made by the GOI to curb settlement expansion and dismantle illegally constructed outposts (The Ambassador's meeting with Ramon will be reported septel).

Readout of December 11 Meeting

13. (C) Prior to his meeting with the Ambassador, Ramon's inter-ministerial committee also met on December 11 to discuss reservations to the MOJ proposal on revising the rules on settlement and outpost construction in the West Bank. Opponents of the proposal were invited to air their reservations to the committee. The following is a readout of the committee's meeting as separately briefed to econoff by Peace Now's Settlement Watch Coordinator Hagit Ofra and Talia Sasson, author of the 2005 report on illegal outposts.

-- Peace Now, Talia Sasson, members of the YESHA settlement council, and some members of committee voiced their

respective objections to the draft proposal during the meeting. According to Ofra and Sasson, Ramon said that he hoped to bring forward the draft proposal for a committee vote within a month. He planned to prepare his own suggestions and bring these suggestions for the committee's vote. Both Ofra and Sasson noted, however, that it was unclear whether Ramon planned to incorporate or address the reservations aired at the meeting. Ramon also did not mention any intention to circulate his suggestions or a subsequent proposal that the ministers would be voting on.

14. (C) Respective Reservations:

-- Peace Now and Sasson: Peace Now and Sasson said that aspects of the draft would allow the expansion and legalization of outposts, as well as thwart any attempts to challenge these actions in court. They noted that the draft subverts the intention of the Sasson report, which was to strengthen government control over settlement construction. Instead, the proposal would decentralize decision-making power away from the GOI and the Defense Minister. Sasson argued that the draft does not require government approval for settlement expansion plans that are "reasonable and adjacent." A vague and undefined "reasonable and adjacent" clause could open the door to rapid expansion of settlements and outposts. She further noted that the draft, as currently written, would allow settlement plans that have previously received approvals to be built without further government oversight. In response to Sasson's comments, Ramon asked the Civil Administration to look into how many settlement plans have been previously approved but not built. Sasson told everyone none of the ministers who attended the meeting spoke in support of her reservations to the proposal.

-- YESHA and right-wing ministers: The MOJ proposal

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currently says that all construction in settlements and their extensions will continue to require GOI approvals. Two exceptions however, are stated in the draft: expansion of settlement construction that is "reasonable and adjacent" to an existing site, or expansion that had received approvals in the past. Representatives of the YESHA settlement council voiced objections to any definition of "reasonable and adjacent." They additionally objected to the draft's stipulation indicating that obtaining government approval would be necessary for all other projects that are neither "reasonable and adjacent," nor already approved at one point.

The settlers claimed that having to obtain government approval for all other projects would make the approval process for construction lengthier. According to Ofra and Sasson, the settlers -- as well as some right-wing ministers -- argued that the building process in the West Bank should be easier.

-- Foreign Minister Livni said that she would send her office's reservations separately, but did not specify when she would send them. It is unclear what her position on the MOJ is, or what her reservations are.

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JONES